

Expect RECOVERY

By John F. Bonfatti

*Expect nothing. Live frugally
On surprise.*

As poetry often does, “Expect Nothing” by Alice Walker made an impression on Diana Kern.

The poem speaks of a life where limited expectations lead to limited disappointments, and as Diana thought about that one day driving to work, she

teer for several community service groups in the Austin, Texas, area. She has been in a committed relationship for seven years and is deeply engaged in a circle of friends. She gets great joy from her pets, from reading poetry, and from writing.

It is easily, she says, the best time of her life.

“It’s made me feel more a part of the world, instead of isolated,” she says of the positive changes. “It’s made me feel normal.”

Tranquility has replaced a turmoil that led to more than 30 hospitalizations in 20 years, beginning in 1981 when Diana was 25.

Married at 22, Diana soon became pregnant. All during the pregnancy and for a year after her daughter was born, she says, she was deeply

depressed. Then: “When she was about a year old, I started hearing voices. I didn’t know anything was wrong. Everybody else knew.”

That first hospitalization lasted a year. Medications proved ineffective and brought unwanted side effects, so she didn’t necessarily take them, she says. That led to continued delusions. “It just kept happening for years and years.”

Her daughter lived with Diana’s parents and sister until she was 6 years old, then moved in with her father until high school. (She now lives in Chicago, and today, Diana says, “We have a wonderful relationship.”)

Gradually over time, medications eased Diana’s chronic depression and helped curtail her hallucinations and delusions. “Slowly,” she says, “I realized

my life was quieter. Everything had always felt so loud. I just felt quieter. I could function. I could think.”

She began volunteering for NAMI Texas, and that worked well enough that she was offered a job—the first she’d ever had, at age 43. She organizes many of the chapter’s events and seminars, in addition to providing a public voice for consumers, whom she urges to “expect recovery.”

To that end, she founded a Web site, www.expectrecovery.com, where she tells visitors, “I learned that while the medications restored the natural functions of my brain, it was up to me to heal my life. I was determined to have a healthy life that was meaningful and rich with hope.” **SZ**

John F. Bonfatti is a native of Massachusetts and a graduate of Northeastern University in Boston. A professional journalist for more than 30 years, he lives in Buffalo, New York.



“I’m not expecting
nothing anymore;
I’m expecting recovery.”

realized it no longer described her life.

“I thought, ‘I’m not expecting nothing anymore; I’m expecting recovery.’”

It’s an expectation that Diana, 51, has mostly realized. As she talks about where she is now compared to 15 years ago, she speaks of accomplishments she never could have believed back then.

She has worked as a consumer advocate and planner for NAMI (the National Alliance on Mental Illness) since 1999, and she is an active volun-

Diana’s coping tips

Keep the faith. “I have a tremendous faith. I pray and meditate more than once daily, and that helps keep me focused on what’s important.”

Work hard, stay positive. “Nothing came easy for me. You have to work so hard to find your place in the world. I avoid negative people. I’m able to keep more positive and have more hope.”

The write stuff. “Writing helps a lot.” Diana journals and writes everything from poetry to short stories to letters to the editor.

Furry friends. Diana has two dogs, along with three cats. Nervous at first about having pets, she has discovered that “being responsible for them feels empowering.”